



# Planning Prevents Pain from ASF

By Geoff Geddes for Swine Innovation Porc | May 20, 2021



John Ross from CPC gave a talk on ASF preparations during Swine Innovation Porc’s webinar “African swine fever: How is Canada getting prepared” held in January 2021.

If you’re one of those people who never sees winter coming, planning is not your forte. Fortunately, those charged with bracing Canada for an outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) are experts at looking ahead and preparing for worst case scenarios. As part of Swine Innovation Porc’s webinar “African Swine Fever: How is Canada Getting Prepared?” for the 2021 Banff Pork Seminar, John Ross reviewed what Canada is doing to face the threat of ASF.

“John Ross joined the Canadian Pork Council (CPC) after 30 years as executive director with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC),” said Stewart Cressman, moderator and SIP chair. “He doesn’t seem that old, but somehow he completed a long term of service.”

In Ross’ current role, prevention of ASF and collaboration with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to contain an outbreak are key aspects of his mandate.



“I’m pleased to say that he has been a great contributor around our pork table,” said Cressman. “You always know where he stands on an issue.”

While dealing with ASF is a daunting task, talking about it can also be a challenge.

“Stewart gave me quite the assignment today to share what Canada is doing to face the threat of ASF, and present it in 10 minutes,” said Ross. “One of my board members suggested I do it without rambling, which could also be an issue for me.”

## Chain reactions

For Canada, one of the complicating factors with ASF is our large, complex supply chain that stretches from coast to coast and involves a range of producers, from those with a couple of pigs to farmers who handle thousands of animals. The chain includes three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal.

“The industry also has to address other issues like wild pigs, and we don’t even know where they are, let alone how many we have. We have discovered small lot producers and are trying to figure out how they factor in as far as the risk they pose.

As well, there is a whole discussion around managing the hog surplus. Canada exports about 70% of the pork it produces, so there must be a contingency plan if we lose those export markets.

## Pillars of prevention

All of these aspects require an ASF action plan comprised of four pillars: biosecurity, preparedness, business continuity and communications. One unique component of this plan is the designation of pillar champions. John Ross fills that position for biosecurity, while Colleen Barnes – executive vice-president at CFIA – deals with a series of issues around preparedness. Morgan Curran-Blaney – vice-president at Maple Leaf Foods

and lead on their fresh pork business – heads business continuity, and Dr. Greg Worley from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Foods chairs the communication group.

### ASF ACTION PLAN

1. Biosecurity
2. Preparedness
3. Business Continuity
4. Communications



“Each of these champions takes an active role in preparing for ASF, and together, they represent a nice mix of leadership from both industry and government.”

The action plan includes numerous committee meetings at the federal, provincial and regional level, requiring a lot of coordination.

“The challenge we have is ensuring that all of these cats are running in the same direction. A great deal of work is being done on a wide range of topics, and people are spending considerable time to get this ASF file under control.”

Taking up that challenge is Dr. Megan Bergman, a longtime friend of the pork sector and current executive director of the National Farm Animal Health and Welfare Council (NFAHWC). Dr. Bergman chairs the ASF executive management board as it tries to corral all elements of ASF planning and make them move as one.

“The council has industry and government members, and under Megan’s leadership, they are seeing some real progress in getting the action plan up and going.”

### Action items

As Ross points out, the hazard here is mistaking planning for action, as “we are good at planning, but that next step is a bit harder”. To avoid that pitfall, planners have identified the top ten actions that must occur to implement the ASF plan, and first among them is the work of the executive management board.

“Number two is funding, and we are seeing some money coming forward in different forms. Just before Christmas, we put together an \$800,000 package between industry and AAFC that includes some dollars for the NFAHWC. Those funds should give Megan a bit more horsepower on her team for quarterbacking the action plan and specific projects like communication to small lot producers.”

Third on the list is CanSpotASF, a first attempt at moving away from traditional disease surveillance methods to involve practitioners at the farm level and producers themselves.

Next up is border security, which represents another key element of the plan.

“You are all familiar with the recent announcement that Canadian Border Services will receive \$31,000,000 for dog teams. We managed to get extra resources put into that space and it came rather quickly. We are also seeing innovative work by CFIA in imposing border controls on imported feed, as it poses a real risk of carrying ASF. Additionally, you can’t get through an airport without seeing signs about the dangers of importing meat into Canada and the risks it poses to our herds, so that is a great tool for raising awareness.”



Canadian Pork Excellence is another action item. This series of on farm programs run by the CPC includes reaching out to producers across the country on aspects like traceability and biosecurity.

Also on the list is zoning and compartmentalization, and their underpinnings of surveillance, biosecurity and traceability.

Part of the plan involves the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative, a group based out of the University of Saskatchewan that is tackling the wild pig file. Funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada, the cooperative's interest is wild pigs as an invasive species and the damage these animals can do to the landscape.

Communication is key to combatting ASF, and good work is being done in this area by provincial and federal governments, as well as the CPC.

Then there is the matter of small lot producers, who number at least 7000 in Canada.

“We picked up these producers through our traceability program. We are now trying to figure out how to give them the information they need to ensure that the risks associated with their activities are managed properly.”

Finally, a lot of work is being done on destruction and disposal, as we must know how to humanely euthanize and safely dispose of animals in the event of an outbreak.

As Ross points out, there are a thousand actions yet to be taken in addressing ASF. Like winter, however, if we don't start planning in advance, we're bound to be left in the cold. 🐷

## Video available!

[Click here to watch a recording of our webinar “African swine fever: How is Canada getting prepared?”](#) that was held on January 6, 2021.

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